

## ABSTRACT

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2 Sort-on-the-Fly/Search-on-the-Fly data retrieval or analysis provides an intuitive  
3 means for accessing databases, allowing a user to access or obtain information about data  
4 in the database without having to know anything about the database structure. A user  
5 selects a desired term, and the method or apparatus delivers all instances of the desired  
6 term, even if a specific file or table does not contain the instance. The database need not  
7 have a specific file (in a flat database) or a table (in a relational database) of names. The  
8 user may specify other criteria, or constraints to narrow the search results, or for other  
9 reasons. The method or apparatus then conducts further analysis or searching using this  
10 criteria and produces a second result. Further narrowing or broadening of the process is  
11 permitted, with search-on-the-fly returning results based on any new constraints. If the  
12 returned information would be too large to be conveniently displayed at a terminal, the  
13 process executes a truncation routine so that the returned data is easily displayed.